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Governor Gray Davis Approves Kehoe's Equal Benefits Legislation

Sacramento, CA – AB 17, authored by Assembly Speaker pro Tempore Christine Kehoe (D-San Diego), was signed into law by Governor Gray Davis on Sunday, October 12. This bill would prohibit state agencies from entering into a contract worth \$100,000 or more for the acquisition of goods or services with businesses that discriminate in providing benefits to their employees with spouses or domestic partners.

"AB 17 is about fairness and equity in the workplace," said Kehoe. "Employees should receive equal pay for equal work regardless of marital or domestic partnership status. Thirty to forty percent of employee compensation comes in the form of health, dental, vision, bereavement leave, pension and retirement benefits."

To address the concerns of religious based organizations, AB 17 includes a provision allowing employers to provide equal benefits without asking employees' marital or domestic partnership status. For employers who have religious objections to domestic partnership, benefits can be provided to "a legally domiciled member of the employee's household."

More than 5,700 entities nationwide, including the State of California, Fortune 500 companies, small and medium-sized businesses, nonprofit organizations, colleges and universities, local and state governments, provide equal benefits to their employees.

"I commend Governor Davis in signing this historic measure," added Kehoe. "Public tax dollars being spent by state agencies to contract for goods and services must not subsidize workplace discrimination. The Governor affirms California's commitment to equality by ensuring that our state would only do business with contractors that do not discriminate against their employees based on marital or domestic partnership status."

There is no cost to the State to implement the requirements of AB 17 as contractors will be required to self-certify their compliance and that state agencies will utilize existing enforcement powers to implement the policy. Additionally, based upon the experience of the various jurisdictions that have adopted similar policies, there should be no increase in direct contracting costs to the state.

Sponsored by Equality California, AB 17 is also supported across the board by small and large businesses such as Sempra Energy, Genentech, and Clear Channel Outdoor, labor coalitions, civil rights and human rights groups, the faith-based community, and organizations that represent children, seniors, women, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. The requirements of AB 17 will go into full effect on January 1, 2007.